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Indigenous rights and development: inequality constraints in Brazilian cities

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirement for the degree of

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Abstract

This thesis aims at identifying how indigenous rights, as part of a human rights approach to development, have been addressed by urban welfare policies in Brazil. As a starting point, this desk based study is primarily focused on an analysis of the impacts of urbanisation on indigenous livelihoods. Despite not being a new trend, urbanisation of indigenous people has exposed their situation of deprivation and disadvantage, and the increasing pressures of assimilation policies. Social indicators of urban indigenous communities' wellbeing have pointed to a growing gap between indigenous and non-indigenous population. The access to distinct basic welfare provision is not only determinant in reducing disparities but would also represent the compliance of a state with the indigenous rights framework. This thesis investigates if and how the Brazilian social agenda is in compliance with and indigenous rights framework.

The Brazilian government acknowledged Brazil as multi-ethnic, which is reflected in the domestic legal framework, and also in the ratification of international covenants and declarations related to indigenous rights. However, the need of the urban indigenous population for differentiated service provisions has represented a challenging matter in policy making. The existence of an implementation gap between the indigenous rights framework and their effective application is a relevant theme for analysis and evaluation, in order to identify the factors that are hindering state compliance with the standards that have already been legislated. To this regard, the experience of urban indigenous communities in Brazil is explored in two case studies, related to the Pankararu, in Sao Paulo, and the Terena, in Campo Grande. The outcomes of the mainstream welfare policies are also investigated through the lens of urban indigenous communities. Ultimately this thesis unveils the potential of the Brazilian state, as the duty-bearer of indigenous rights, as capable and responsible to unleash the realisation of indigenous expectations to overcome powerlessness, economic underdevelopment and cultural disruptions.

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Table of contents

Abstract.....	ii
----------------------	-----------

Acknowledgements	iii
-------------------------------	------------

Table of contents	iv
--------------------------------	-----------

Chapter 1

Introduction	1
---------------------------	----------

1.1 Rationale to undertake this study	2
---	---

1.2 Research aim and questions	3
--------------------------------------	---

1.3 Introduction to the theoretical framework.....	4
--	---

1.4 Methodology	6
-----------------------	---

1.5 Thesis outline	7
--------------------------	---

Chapter 2

The right to indigenous inclusion in development	9
---	----------

2.1 Introduction	9
------------------------	---

2.2 Indigenous urban drift: the human rights situation and living conditions in urban areas.....	11
--	----

2.2.1 The impact of urban drift on indigenous livelihoods	13
---	----

2.3 Indigenous rights within human rights approaches to development.....	15
--	----

2.3.1 The development of conceptual and legal frameworks of indigenous rights	16
---	----

2.3.2 Emergence of indigenous organisations and indigenous advocacy	20
---	----

2.4 Ethnodevelopment policies: the indigenous right to development	22
--	----

2.5 Subaltern indigenous development	25
--	----

2.6 Chapter conclusions	27
-------------------------------	----

Chapter 3

Multi-ethnic Brazil and the constraints of the urban indigenous population	28
3.1 Introduction	28
3.2 General background on Brazil	28
3.2.1 The unequal social and spatial occupation of urban land.....	30
3.2.2 Urbanisation and development: the challenge and the role of the Brazilian government	31
3.3 Indigenous people in Brazil	33
3.3.1 Impact of development on indigenous demography and livelihood	34
3.3.2 The recent situation of Brazilian indigenous people	34
3.3.3 The legal framework: Indigenous people as Brazilian citizens.....	37

Chapter 4

The exclusionary experience of Brazilian urban indigenous people...	40
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 Being indigenous and being invisible: the geography of urban exclusion.....	41
4.2.1 Struggling to survive: the Pankararu in Sao Paulo.....	42
4.2.2 Displaced and encroached: the Terena stalemate.....	45
4.2.3 Commonalities in the narratives of deprivation of urban indigenous communities.....	48
4.3 Urban indigeneity in perspective: Politics of indigeneity	49
4.3.1 Access to a culturally-sensitive health provision	50
4.3.2 Access to a culturally-sensitive education provision	53
4.3.3 Access to mainstream housing policy	55
4.3.4 Access to mainstream cash transfer policies	57

4.4 Chapter conclusions	58
-------------------------------	----

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions	60
---	-----------

5.1 Introduction	60
------------------------	----

5.1.1 Thesis summary.....	60
---------------------------	----

5.2 Key issues in the context of this study	61
---	----

5.2.1 Key issue 1: social inclusion in welfare policies in Brazil.....	62
--	----

5.2.2 Key issue 2: social inclusion in practice	63
---	----

5.2.3 Key issue 3: social inclusion in the context of ethnodevelopment policies ..	67
--	----

5.3 Conclusions and recommendations.....	68
--	----

5.4 Unlocking the silence, breaking out invisibility	72
--	----

References	74
-------------------------	-----------

Appendices

Appendix 1: Consultation – FUNAI (National Indigenous Foundation)	88
--	----

Appendix 2: Consultation - Ministry of Health	90
--	----

Appendix 3: Consultation - Ministry of Education	91
---	----

Appendix 4: Consultation - Ministry of Cities	93
--	----

Appendix 5: Consultation - Ministry of Social Development	94
--	----

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